

**IN THE CLAIMS:**

1. (Currently amended) A spinal instrument assembly, comprising:

a guide sleeve housing including a proximal portion and a distal portion, said proximal portion including an inner wall defining a proximal chamber, said housing further including a first working channel port and a second working channel port extending through said distal portion and extending distally from and forming an extension of in communication with one another and in communication with said proximal chamber, wherein said first and second working channel ports are in communication with one another through said distal portion to together form an oval shaped working channel port through said distal portion together form a substantially oval cross sectional shape; and

a central distractor in said chamber of said guide sleeve housing, said central distractor including a distractor tip movably positionable between said first and second working channel ports, said distractor tip including upper and lower distraction surfaces defining a distraction height therebetween to maintain distraction of a spinal disc space.

2. (Original) The instrument assembly of claim 1, wherein said proximal chamber is sized to receive a distal end of a guide sleeve.

3. (Original) The instrument assembly of claim 1, wherein said tip of said central distractor is centrally located in said housing.

4. (Original) The instrument assembly of claim 1, wherein said central distractor is rotatable from a reduced height configuration whereby said upper and lower distraction surfaces are oriented away from vertebral endplates of a spinal disc space to a distraction configuration whereby said upper and lower distraction surfaces are oriented toward vertebral endplates of the spinal disc space.

5. (Currently amended) The instrument assembly of claim 1, further comprising a housing inserter including a distal engaging portion and a handle extending proximally from said distal engaging portion and wherein said guide sleeve housing is removably engageable to said distal engaging portion of said housing inserter.~~a housing inserter.~~

6. (Currently amended) The instrument assembly of claim 5, wherein said central distractor includes a shaft extending proximally from said distractor tip.

Claim 7 (Cancelled)

8. (Currently amended) The instrument assembly of claim 6, wherein said housing inserter includes a passageway opening at a proximal end of said handle and at a distally oriented face of said engaging portion, and claim 5, wherein said shaft of said central distractor is sized for receipt in said passageway so that said housing inserter and said guide sleeve housing are positionable over a proximal end of a shaft of said central distractor and movable along said shaft toward said distractor tip therealong to position said guide sleeve housing in said operative position.

9. (Currently amended) The instrument assembly of claim 1, wherein said proximal portion of said guide sleeve housing inner wall defines a groove formed in said inner wall that defines said proximal chamber therein.

10. (Currently amended) The instrument assembly of claim 9, wherein said central distractor includes a housing engaging portion with a finger received in a receptacle, said finger being movable from a location in said receptacle to a location projecting from said receptacle to removably engage having an actuatable finger for removably engaging said groove of said guide sleeve housing.

11. (Original) The instrument assembly of claim 10, wherein:

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said central distractor tip includes a reduced height configuration whereby said upper and lower distraction surfaces are orientable away from vertebral endplates of a spinal disc space and said finger is not engaged to said guide sleeve housing; and

said central distractor tip is rotatable to a distraction configuration from said reduced height configuration whereby said upper and lower distraction surfaces are orientable toward vertebral endplates of a spinal disc space and said finger is actuated and received in said groove thereby coupling said guide sleeve housing to said central distractor.

12. (Currently amended) The instrument assembly of claim 1, wherein said guide sleeve housing is removably engageable to a housing inserter, said housing inserter including a finger, a shaft coupled to and extending proximally from said finger, and an actuation handle coupled to a proximal end of said shaft, said finger being movable with said actuation handle to removably engage having an actuatable finger positionable to engage said housing inserter to said guide sleeve housing.

13. (Currently amended) The instrument assembly of claim 12, wherein said central distractor includes a shaft extending proximally from said distractor tip and wherein said housing inserter and said guide sleeve housing are positionable over a proximal end of said shaft of said central distractor and movable therealong to position said guide sleeve housing in an operative position adjacent the spinal disc space.

14. (Original) The instrument assembly of claim 1, wherein said central distractor is withdrawable from said guide sleeve housing.

15. (Original) The instrument assembly of claim 1, further comprising a guide sleeve engageable to said proximal portion of said guide sleeve housing.

16. (Original) The instrument assembly of claim 1, wherein said first working channel port and said second working channel port of said guide sleeve housing are in communication with one another through said guide sleeve housing.

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17. (Original) The instrument assembly of claim 1, wherein said guide sleeve housing includes a pair of lateral flanges extending distally therefrom on opposite lateral sides of said guide sleeve housing.

18. (Original) The instrument assembly of claim 17, wherein each of said lateral flanges has a non-distracting height between upper and lower surfaces thereof.

19. (Currently amended) The instrument assembly of claim 1, wherein when in an operative position said proximal portion of said guide sleeve housing includes a first width transverse to the spinal column axis and said distal portion includes a second width transverse to the spinal column axis, said first width being greater than said second width and said central distractor extends distally from said distal portion.

Claims 20-26 (Cancelled)

27. (Currently amended) A spinal surgical instrument, comprising:

a shaft;

an engaging portion at a distal end of said shaft releasably engageable with a member positioned about said engaging portion, wherein said member is a guide sleeve housing defining first and second access ports therethrough for accessing a spinal disc space with said engaging portion removed therefrom, said guide sleeve housing including a proximal portion defining a proximal chamber and a distal portion defining said first and second access ports as a distal extension of said proximal chamber; ~~said access ports being in communication with one another and together defining a substantially oval cross-sectional shape through said guide sleeve housing;~~ and

a distractor tip extending distally of said engaging portion, wherein said engaging portion is enlarged and extends outwardly from each of ~~includes an enlarged configuration relative to said~~ shaft and said distractor tip, said enlarged configuration being sized and shaped to fit in said

proximal chamber with a close interfit to provide a rigid assembly between said engaging portion and said guide sleeve housing.

28. (Original) The instrument of claim 27, wherein said distractor tip is rotatable relative to said engaging portion between a distraction configuration and a reduced height configuration.

29. (Original) The instrument of claim 28, wherein said distractor tip includes an upper distracting surface and an opposite lower distracting surface.

30. (Original) The instrument of claim 29, wherein at least one of said upper and lower distracting surfaces includes a vertebral endplate engaging surface.

31. (Currently amended) The instrument of claim 27, wherein said engaging portion includes a receptacle formed therein and a finger movable ~~into and out of~~ said receptacle to between an engagement position wherein said finger engages said guide sleeve housing in said proximal chamber for engaging said member positioned about said engaging portion and wherein said finger is movable to a release position into said receptacle to release said guide sleeve housing for releasing said member from said engaging portion.

32. (Currently amended) The instrument of claim 31, wherein said distractor tip is rotatable relative to said engaging portion with said shaft, said distractor tip ~~having a being movable between a distraction configuration which positions said finger in said engagement position and said distractor tip is rotatable from said distraction configuration to a reduced height configuration by rotating said shaft relative to said engaging portion, wherein rotation of said shaft also moves said finger to said release position, wherein said finger engages said member and a reduced height configuration wherein said finger is released from said member.~~

Claim 33 (Cancelled)

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34. (Previously presented) The instrument of claim 27, wherein said guide sleeve housing includes a pair of lateral flanges extending distally therefrom on opposite lateral sides of said guide sleeve housing.

35. (Original) The instrument assembly of claim 34, wherein each of said lateral flanges has a non-distracting height between upper and lower surfaces thereof.

36. (New) A spinal instrument assembly, comprising:

a guide sleeve housing including a proximal portion and a distal portion, said proximal portion including an inner wall defining a proximal chamber, said housing further including a first working channel port and a second working channel port extending through said distal portion in communication with one another and in communication with said proximal chamber, wherein said guide sleeve housing does not include a medial wall in said proximal chamber between first and second working channel ports; and

a central distractor in said chamber of said guide sleeve housing, said central distractor including a distractor tip between said first and second working channel ports, said distractor tip including upper and lower distraction surfaces defining a distraction height therebetween to maintain distraction of a spinal disc space.

37. (New) The assembly of claim 36, wherein said proximal portion includes an overall width between opposite lateral sides thereof that is less than an overall width between opposite lateral sides of said distal portion of said guide sleeve housing, and further wherein said guide sleeve housing includes a lip extending completely therearound at the junction between said proximal portion and said distal portion to provide an external indication of the relative locations of the proximal and distal portions, and further wherein said central distractor extends distally from said distal portion.

38. (New) The assembly of claim 36, wherein said central distractor is removable from said guide sleeve housing.